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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000784

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SUBJECT: CENTAM CHIEFS OF MISSION BEWILDERED BY ORTEGA'S
"DOUBLE DISCOURSE"

REF: MANAGUA 0140

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Central American COMs in Nicaragua agree that the Ortega administration is pursuing a "double discourse" in foreign and economic policy, which makes predicting a future trajectory difficult. They have also been perturbed by protocol irregularities, including a delay in the accreditation of the new ambassador from Costa Rica. Nevertheless, Costa Rica in particular is prepared to assist Nicaragua if the administration proves that it is serious about development and poverty reduction. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Trivelli hosted a second breakfast for a group of Central American COMs on March 22 to discuss developments in the progress of President Daniel Ortega's administration. The following Chiefs of Mission attended the breakfast:

- Costa Rica: Antonio Tacsan Lam
- El Salvador: Jose Roberto Lasala (Charge)
- Honduras: Jorge Milla
- Guatemala: Jorge Echeverria
- Panama: Miguel Lecaro

¶3. (C) The ambassadors admitted that they are confused by and skeptical over the Ortega administration's often conflicting messages and signals. For example, President Ortega hosts Hugo Chavez and lambastes the U.S. while Foreign Minister Samuel Santos exalts a "positive, respectful, and healthy" relationship with the same country. In the case of Honduras, Ortega spoke of Central American brotherhood privately with President Zelaya, but now attacks Honduras regularly over border disputes and military procurements. The ambassadors concurred that Ortega is merely paying lip service to regional integration. Guatemalan Ambassador Echeverria mentioned that Ortega has sent lower-ranking officials or abstained from recent summits on Central American integration, despite official declarations supporting the project.

¶4. (C) Several of the Ambassadors reported that the Foreign Ministry is often woefully ignorant of Presidential activities and noted protocol irregularities committed by the government. Costa Rican Ambassador Antonio Tacsan Lam, who has been present in Nicaragua for two months, has yet to receive his accreditation. (Note: Tacsan Lam indicated that Costa Rica was quietly holding back on accreditation on Nicaragua's new ambassador in San Jose until the issue is resolved. End Note.) In contrast, the Cuban and Libyan

ambassadors were in country for less than a week before being accredited. Both the Panamanian and Guatemalan ambassadors have received "confidential" requests for agreement for the new ambassadors that Nicaragua is proposing to send to their countries -- and these "secret" designates have shown up on their doorsteps seeking advice on their new posts.

¶15. (C) Ambassador Tacsan Lam commented that Ortega is "a reality that we must live with," and that Costa Rica is prepared to assist Nicaragua if Ortega is "truly interested in development." According to Tacsan Lam, improving primary education is key to reducing poverty in Nicaragua. Depending on the future context of bilateral relations, he may propose exchanging Nicaraguan debt to Costa Rica for a matching investment in primary education and will also consider development assistance for the border area between the two countries.

¶16. (C) Towards the end of the meeting, Panamanian Ambassador Lecaro mentioned the country-wide expansion of convicted PLC leader Arnoldo Aleman's medical parole and reminded the group that the Nicaraguans have an outstanding arrest order from his government. Lecaro agreed with rumors that Aleman is rebuilding his base of support for a possible presidential run in 2011. Shaking his head, Lecaro remark that "if Aleman is elected President, I will rip up my credentials and go home." Nevertheless, Lecaro acknowledged that his government is unlikely to push for Aleman's incarceration or deportation.

¶17. (C) Comment: After almost three months, there is no love lost between Ortega and the Central American ambassadors, regardless of their respective governments position on the ideological spectrum. They regard the administration as disorganized and increasingly obedient to the whims of Chavez and his Bolivarian Revolution. They nevertheless concede the necessity of working with their neighbor on regional security and development.

TRIVELLI